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ABSTRACT

This instructional packet is one of 14 school environmental education programs developed for use in the classroom and at the Dahlem Environmental Education Center (DEEC) of the Jackson Community College (Michigan). Provided in the packet are pre-trip activities, field trip activities, and post-trip activities which focus on the characteristics of spring. Strategies for using these activities with preschool children are also provided. The pre-trip activities are used to introduce the concept of seasonal change and to sharpen students' senses of hearing, seeing, smelling, touching, tasting, and moving. An activity sheet and a letter to parents explaining the purpose of the program are included. The field trip involves both indoor and outdoor activities during which children explore spring phenomena. (These activities and lists of formal and non-formal field trip objectives are provided in a separate field trip guide.) Post-trip activities are designed to extend students' exploration of spring into the home and school environments. (JN)

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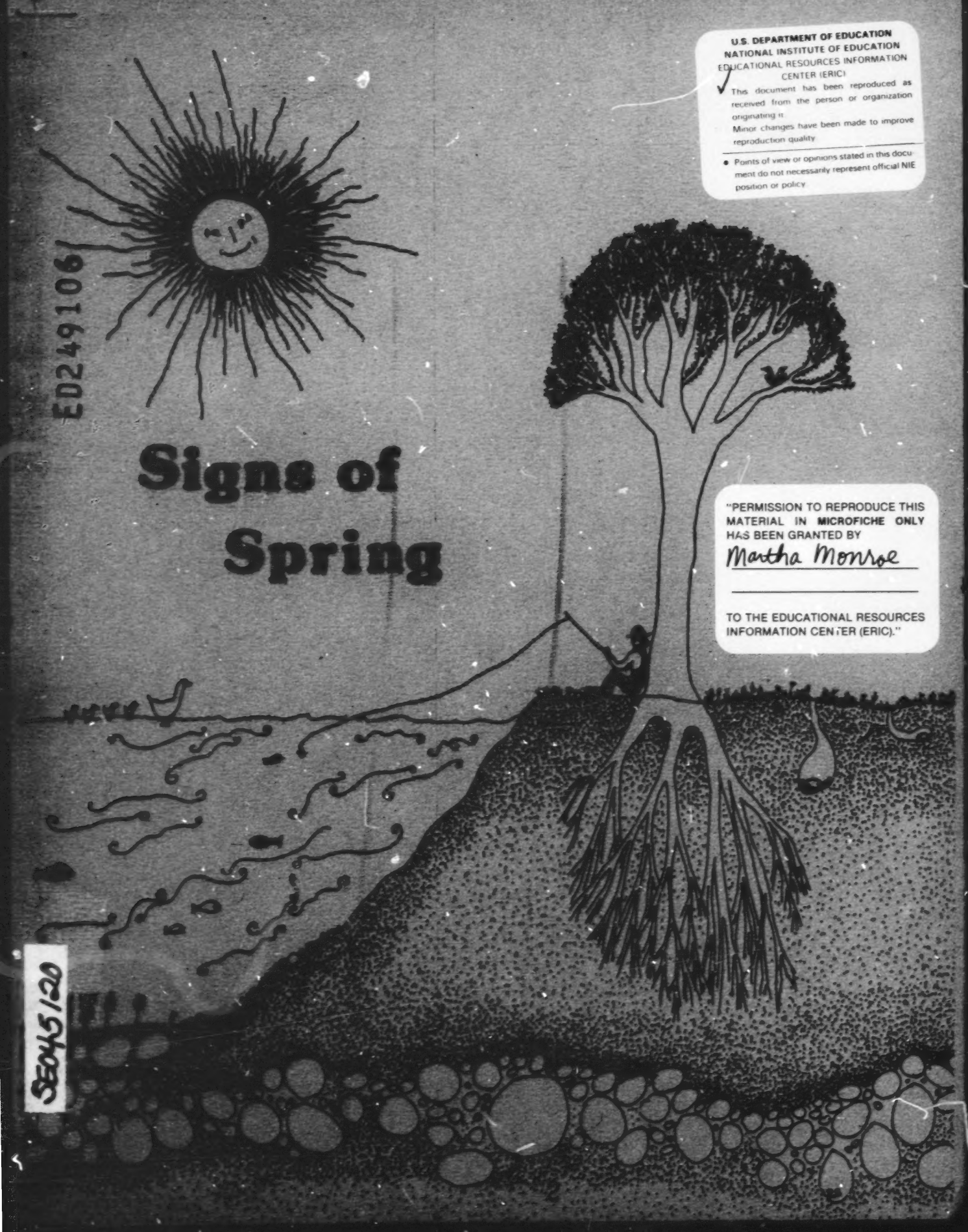
Signs of Spring



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Signs of Spring

A Spring Activity Packet for Pre-School

It's spring! From the cracking ice in March to the warm days of May, signs of seasonal change can be seen all around. Spring's a time of growth for plants and animals and an exciting season to explore the outdoors with your pre-schoolers.

"Signs of Spring" is a three-part program designed to heighten your students' awareness of their environment through their senses. This packet contains pre-trip activity ideas you can use to introduce the concept of seasonal change and to prepare your little people for their excursion to the Dahlem Environmental Education Center. During their field trip your students will explore spring in the outdoors. After your return to the classroom, you can select post-trip activities from this packet that will extend your students' exploration of spring into the home and school environments.

Our world is filled with a myriad of wonders that most of us miss every day, because we don't stop to use our senses. As teachers, (facilitators of learning), we can help students notice some of these magical moments by being active role models and providing a rich variety of experiences. This is all a part of their growing, and ours too!

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Goals and Objectives

Program Goal

Pre-school students will become more aware of the characteristics of spring by exploring their environment.

Program Objectives

Students will:

-heighten their sensory awareness by hearing, seeing, smelling, touching, and tasting.

-identify seasonal changes by sorting and drawing pictures, choosing clothing, and pointing out signs of spring in the natural and school environments.

-discriminate colors by matching objects to color cards.

-discriminate shapes by sorting square, round, and triangular objects.

-discriminate sizes by arranging natural objects in order from small to large.

-improve their ability to number by counting natural objects.

-express themselves creatively through fingerplays and a roleplay.

Pre-Trip Activities

The following seven activities are important because they will prepare your class for their field trip. Many of them are designed to strengthen your students' senses. This is a critical first step; the sharper their senses, the more they will experience.

1 Hearing

To practice listening, ask your students to put one hand in the air, and without making any noise, to extend one finger each time they hear a different sound. If they have a difficult time hearing, ask them to close their eyes. After each child has heard several different sounds, ask students to name the sounds and the sound-makers. Try this quick activity in different areas.

Also try--

- listening to heartbeats through a stethoscope
- pointing in the direction of a sound's source (without looking)
- listening to musical instruments

2 Seeing

Have students point out or name different colors. Ask them to match classroom objects to the appropriate color on a giant color chart. (You can make one with construction paper.) Help them discover the world of color! Where should they place objects that don't exactly match? How many colors do they see?

Ask your students to draw, collect, or name objects that have certain shapes--a circle (a ball), a triangle (the side of a roof), or a square (a box). Challenge the students to sort, order, and match a variety of objects with these shapes.

3 Smelling

Can your students smell? Awaken this important sense by asking them to sniff a variety of aromas. Provide crushed garlic, spices, and herbal teas, and cottonballs soaked in vanilla, perfume, or vinegar. Can they close their mouths and inhale deeply? Which smells do they like or dislike? Which is the strongest? Can they identify smells?

4 Touching

Sharpen your student's sense of touch by giving them objects they can't see. (Blindfold them or make a "feelie box" for their hands or feet. Use hat, shoe or Kleenex boxes. Attach a "sleeve" made from an old toeless sock to discourage peeking.) Try familiar objects--an orange, or a banana--and a few rather unique textures--a pine cone, a feather, and a piece of fur. Can they identify certain objects? Compare sizes and textures? Challenge students to "see" through their fingertips.

5 Tasting

Taste is another important sense, but not one that your students will utilize on their field trip. Rather than risk a negative reaction, we do not encourage students to taste or eat wild plants. But don't let that stop you from encouraging your students to explore their sense of taste with regular food! How well can they taste their sandwiches or cookies with their eyes closed or their noses plugged?

6 Moving

Going on a field trip may be a brand new experience for some of your students. You can prepare them for the logistics of the trip by practicing:

•walking in a group two or three abreast

•forming a circle ("Blow up" the balloon!)

•passing objects to others in the circle

7 Seasonal Changes

Seasonal change is an important topic for any spring exploration. Signs of seasonal change are all around. Here are some activity ideas for reviewing the idea of environmental changes and their effect on us.

•Help your students sort pictures (family photos or magazine pictures) of the different seasons. Discuss the changes they see in the pictures that clue them to the season. You may wish to choose pictures that clearly depict one season and help your students organize their piles chronologically.

•With seasonal changes come weather changes and different sets of clothes. What clothes do your children wear in different seasons? Ask them to dress dolls or flannel board figures for the different seasons. What should they wear on their field trip?

•Seasons bring changes in nature, too. The plants and the animals are constantly growing, changing, and dying as the months progress. From your classroom window, what signs of seasonal change can your students see?

•Activity Sheet 1 gives them the opportunity to be creative by designing trees for different seasons. (Spring may be the most appropriate!) Try using crayons, different colors of construction paper, or gluing on maple seeds or cottonball "snow". Let the kids be inventive!

Vocabulary Words

As a result of these pre-trip activities, your students probably became familiar with these words:

seasons	year	spring
summer	fall	winter
hear	see	smell
touch	eye	ear
nose		skin

The following words will be used during the field trip. You may wish to remember them for a post-trip activity:

boardwalk	bridge	stream
marsh	trail	flower
moss	beehive	ant hill
	bark	

Activity Sheet 1
Seasonal Changes

Dear Parent,

Spring is here! With the warm, wet weather comes our spring field trip to the Dahlem Environmental Education Center. During our trip we will explore the world of nature for telltale signs of spring; new leaves, wildflowers, crayfish castles, and bird songs are a few examples.

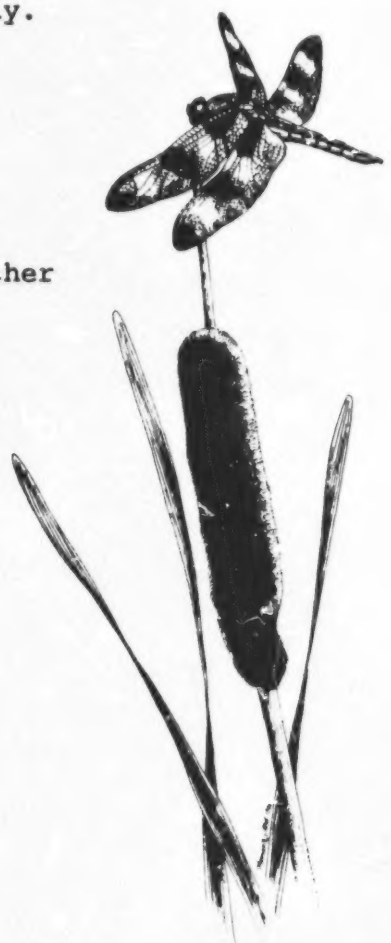
Please make sure your son or daughter is dressed for being outside. Waterproof shoes and a warm jacket are recommended. You may want to check the weather forecast for rain, too.

You can participate in our exploration of seasons by:

- pointing out seasonal changes in your neighborhood (flowers, bird nests, gardens, etc.).
- going on a spring walk with your family.
- visit the Dahlem Center.

Sincerely,

Pre-School Teacher



Field Trip

Now your students are ready for their field trip to the Dahlem Environmental Education Center! Thanks to the fine background you provided them, their experience will be enriched.

The field trip will begin with a short introduction. A naturalist will lead a discussion about the seasons and the signs of spring you can expect to see outdoors. During your walk, the naturalist will help you discover a variety of smells, sounds, textures, and colors. Your students will be invited to explore with each of their senses. Natural objects will be passed, counted, compared, and returned to their place of origin. Unless rain limits the length of the walk, your students will cross a boardwalk in a marsh and a bridge over a stream.

Don't forget to dress for the weather and to remind your students that everything at the Dahlem Center must remain there for other people to enjoy, too.

A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring, is dimmed and even lost before we reach adulthood. If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructable that it would last throughout life as an unfailing antidote against boredom and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength.

from Rachel Carson's THE SENSE OF WONDER, copyright 1956, Harper and Row, Inc., pp. 42-43.

Post-Trip Activities

After your field trip please extend the experiences, skills, and concepts that have been introduced by reminding your students of the pre-trip activities and the sights, sounds, and smells they encountered on their field trip. Compare them to additional sensory experiences in your classroom and on the school site. Here are six activity ideas to get you started.

1 Exploring

While you are still fresh from your field trip, explore your schoolgrounds for signs of spring! Don't forget to count the new leaves, green shoots, singing birds, small flowers, and rain puddles. Which signs of spring can the children remember observing on the field trip? Explore the neighborhood surrounding the school, too!

2 Hearing

Help your student tape record sounds from your school grounds. Return to your room and listen to the tape. Are there sounds on the tape that they didn't notice outside? Which sounds did they also hear on the field trip? Ask your pre-schoolers to draw pictures inspired by the sounds.

3 Seeing

Remember the pre-trip color chart activity? Continue it by inviting your students to make their own color palettes. Different colors of crayons or construction paper should give them enough of a variety. Take your class outdoors and ask them to match the objects they see with the colors on their charts. Can they find an object for each color? What colors are the easiest to find? Hardest?

4 Role-Playing

This activity is one of creative expression. While you do not want to stifle your students' creativity, you may want to give them some preparation. You might introduce this activity by reviewing the different stages of plant growth. Then act out the role-play with your students.

Seat your students comfortably on the classroom floor or the school lawn. You and your class are about to turn into a field of plants.

Begin by pretending that you are seeds -- small, curled up bundles inside hard shells. Then act out the following role-play. Your students can either keep their eyes open or closed throughout or they can begin with their eyes shut and open them when they "burst" through the ground and "see" the sun!

We are seeds. We dropped from plants last fall. We were soon buried by soil and leaves. It was very dark. We were cold. The snow piled on top of us, but it has since melted. We're beginning to feel warm. A spring rain is sprinkling the dirt around us. We are getting wet! We swell bigger and bigger. We burst through our hard seed coats! Very slowly we continue to grow. First our roots uncurl and then our stems. Slowly but surely, our stems stretch up to the crusty surface of the soil. Finally we break through the soil and into the air! We see the sun!

We begin to grow toward it. Our stems stretch upward -- higher and higher. Our branches spread out -- wider and wider. Slowly our leaves unfold. We are now grown-up plants with strong roots, stems, and branches and big leaves. We sway gently in the breeze. It feels so good to be alive!

Continue the fantasy by acting out the changes that occur in summer, fall, and winter. Ask your students what plants they were pretending to be. Can they draw themselves? The field of plants?

5 Fingerplays for Fun

The following selection of fingerplays will bring spring right into your classroom! The motions on the right correspond with the words on the left. Try a few -- then make up some of your own!

"Falling Raindrops"

Raindrops, raindrops,	*Move fingers to imitate falling rain*
Falling all around.	
Pitter-patter on the rooftops,	*Tap softly on the floor*
Pitter-patter on the ground.	*Repeat*
Here is my umbrella,	*Pretend to open umbrella*
It will keep me dry.	*Place over head*
When I go walking in the rain,	
I hold it up so high.	*Hold high in the air*

"Little Raindrops"

This is the sun,	*Form large circle with arms up*
High up in the sky.	
A dark cloud suddenly	*Move hands through the air in a parallel motion*
Comes sailing by.	
These are the raindrops,	*Bring arms down and flutter fingers*
Pitter pattering down,	
Watering the flowers,	*Cup hands to form flowers*
Growing on the ground.	

"The Leaves, Flowers, and Birds"

The leaves are gently falling,	*Hold hands high and let them fall gently*
Falling, falling to the ground.	
The flowers are gently nodding,	*Nod head forward*
Nodding, nodding in the breeze.	
The birds are swiftly flying,	*Make flying motion with hands*
Flying, flying to the trees.	

"The Flower"

Here's a green leaf	*Show hand*
And here's a green leaf;	*Show other hand*
That, you see, makes two.	*Hold up two fingers*
Here is a bud	*Cup hands together*
That makes a flower;	
Watch it bloom for you!	*Open cupped hands gradually*

"Beehive"

Here is the little beehive.	*Hold up right hand with fingers curled under*
Where are the bees?	
Soon they come creeping out of the hive,	*Raise a thumb and fingers one at a time*
One, two, three, four, five.	

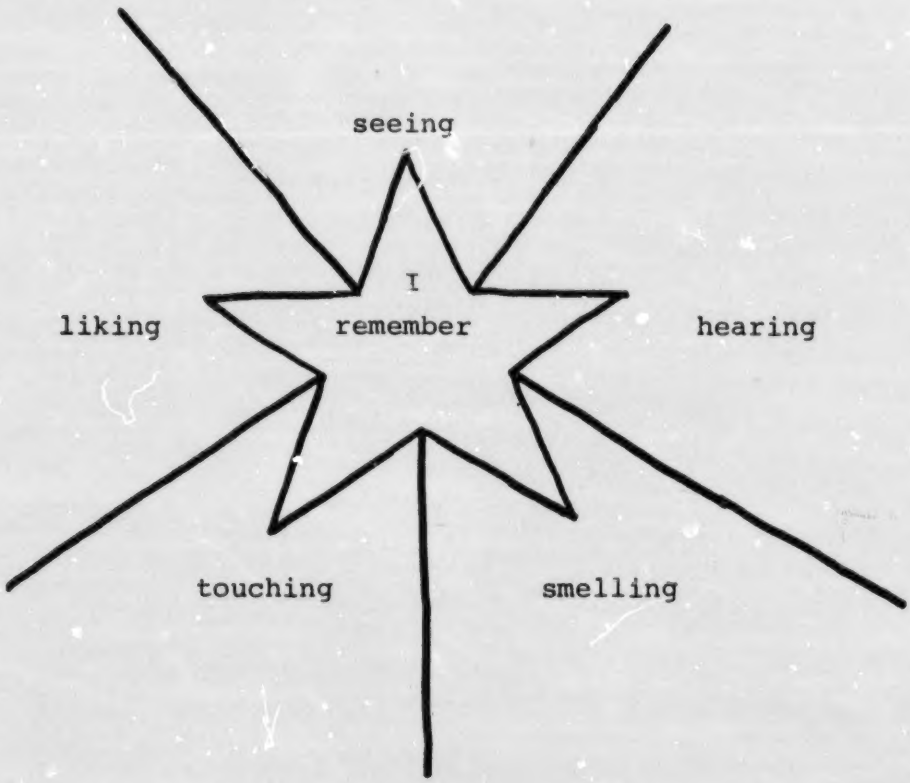
"Eency, Weency, Spider"

An eency, weency spider	*One hand climbs up arm to shoulder*
Climbed up the water spout.	
Down came the rain	*Raise hands high in air and drop them down quickly*
and washed the spider out.	*Hand slides down arm*
Out came the sun and	*Arms form circle over head*
Dried up all the rain.	
And the eency, weency spider	
Climbed up the spout again.	*Hand goes back up arm to shoulder*

Now it's your turn!

6 I Remember

Recapture the special moments of the field trip by adapting the illustration on the following page into a large mural or bulletin board display. Ask students to make drawings for each of the categories. Try creating stories from the pictures!



Want to Keep Going?

- Make up a skit about spring.
- Draw spring!
- Create a group story about the field trip and share it with another class.

Congratulations! You've officially completed "Signs of Spring." It's time to compliment your little ones on the fine job they've done. And don't forget to pat yourself on the back! You worked hard to help your students learn about the seasons, become more aware of their school and natural environment, and practice many skills. Your efforts made "Signs of Spring" a more meaningful experience for your students. Well done, Teach!

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At REMC. . .

The Jackson County Intermediate School District's Regional Education Media Center has the following:

Seeing the Seasons Change — SE 1338.1
four filmstrips and cassettes:
Spring
Fall
Winter
Summer

Environmental Awareness — SE 477
Five filmstrips and cassettes:
Awareness of Forest and Field
Awareness in the City
Colors in Nature
Patterns in Nature
Textures in Nature

SIGNS OF SPRING

Pre-School Field Trip

Formal Objectives

Discuss seasonal changes, especially those that occur in spring.

Discover signs of spring in the natural environment.

Observe that different shapes, colors, sizes, numbers, odors, sounds, and textures are present in the natural environment.

Practice counting natural objects and matching colors.

Smell odors in the natural environment.

Identify sounds in the natural environment.

Use their sense of touch to distinguish between objects in the natural environment and built environments.

Informal Objectives

Have a fun experience!

Involve senses in discovering the outdoor world.

Practice early educational skills: matching, counting, and comparing.

Observe and understand seasonal changes.

Indoor Portion

When the group arrives, invite them to look around the building. Point out to them the bees' entrance and answer their questions. When they have seen it all, ask them to sit down facing the window. Tell them about the Dahlem Center. Introduce yourself and the field guides and ask them about the seasons.

Use the season wheel to ask them what season it is, was last, will be next, etc. Use the spring picture to mention signs of spring. Try to find outdoor signs by looking through the window.

Introduce the puppet show by saying, "Some special guests are going to tell us how they notice these signs of spring." See the attached outline.

On your way outside, remind the group they they can touch and smell, etc.---but everything must stay here except their memories!

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Suggested Trail

Behind the building, across the boardwalk, along the stream, (try stopping in the tiny opening) to the bridge and beyond, if there's time, back to the main trail. Take the Arboretum Trail to the right and loop back to the building.

Suggested Signs and Changes to Look For

animal homes	sun	worms
leaves	birds	melting snow
flowers	shoots	skunk cabbage
insects	green	water critters
moss	mushrooms	bursting buds

Activities

Every walk should cover a minimum of our objectives by spending time on the senses, spring, and a few skills. It's easy to combine them and to tie these objectives into everything that the kids find. You can:

smell flowers, sassafras, cedar, pine, dirt, etc.
listen to birds, wind, water, leaves crunching in your hand, etc.
match colors, find shapes, compare leaves
look through, under, into, and around objects
find lots of one thing (acorn, leaves, stones) and compare their sizes. How many fit in one hand?
walk quietly, noisily, run like the wind, dance like a bee in a hive, or a dandelion in the breeze...
feel moss, the texture of bark, the temperature of the water...
turn over a log, or pull a vole from your pocket to find animals!
lie on the board walk to examine the water critters

Kids this age don't have a long attention span or a great memory, so don't be afraid to repeat an activity or emphasize a point. It may work out best to go to one place and concentrate on sounds, another for smells, another for colors (bring cards), etc. Try to compare the natural world to the worlds of home and school and invite them to do the same thing there! Use their energy by asking them to do the following exercises: rolling, running, or pretending to be an appropriate animal or object.

Unnature Trail

A small section of the trail (north Arboretum section) will be set aside as the Unnature Trail. This activity will be done last, after they've explored what's here, and hopefully, will be a review of sorts.

Along the trail will be 10 objects normally found in a house. The kids will discover these objects and then search for all the things that do belong on the trail.

When you introduce this activity, make it clear to the kids that these things have been placed there--it's a game to test their sense of sight and powers of observation. We want them to look for what doesn't belong in the woods. As they point out the objects (leave them distributed for another group), ask them where these things do belong. After the kids have discovered all of the objects, ask them to name off everything they've seen at the Center, or see from that point on, that does belong here. Done well, this could be a great activity, but let's try to avoid a situation where the ice cube tray in the tree is the highlight of a child's trip to the Center!

Return to the Building

As you wrap up the program, briefly ask the group to mention what they've seen or learned: "Can you name 3 signs of spring?" "What did you hear at the Center?" "What did you like best on your trip?"

Thank the group for coming to visit, and encourage them to come back with Mom and Dad!

SENSING SPRING - A PRESCHOOL PUPPET SHOW

#1 I'm so glad that we could come and visit the Dahlem Center today, aren't you?

#2 I dunno.

#1 I can't wait to go outside and see the new leaves growing and the flowers blooming. Did you see how pretty it is as we walked in from the parking lot?

#2 I dunno

#1 I bet the flowers will smell great, too--do you think so?

#2 I dunno.

#1 Do you think the grass will feel wet from the dew this morning?

#2 I dunno.

#1 Maybe we'll even hear birds singing and some frogs croaking. Do you think we will?

#2 I dunno.

#1 What's the matter with you today? Aren't you excited about being here at the Dahlem Center?

#2 Yes, but...I can't see or hear or smell or feel anything.

#1 Oh--that is a problem. Why can't you see or hear or smell or feel anything? Hey--you don't look much like me. You're missing a few things. (to the kids): Do you know what my friend needs? (ears, eyes, hands, nose) You're right! Let's help him out. (Children give her sensory organs.**

#2 Wow! I feel great! I have eyes to see with, ears to hear with, hands and skin to feel with, and a nose to smell with. I want to go outside and practice using my senses. Boys and girls, would you like to come with me?

** Use magic markers on paper bag puppets. Tape, velcro, or snap felt organs onto a sock puppet. Place organs in the wrong place (e.g., the eye where the ear belongs, etc.) and ask the kids to correct you.